

Boys

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Summary:

Everyone kind of knew the Richie situation, even if they were too polite to say so.

As with many situations, it was all okay until it wasn't.

The day Richie showed up to school with tears in his eyes and ribbons in his hair, Eddie knew something had to be done.

Boys

Author's Note:

This is my first Reddie fic please be gentle. Warnings are in the tags but just in case you missed them: this fic references alcoholism, and features transphobia. There's no physical violence or transphobic slurs used.

Everyone kind of knew the Richie situation, even if they were too polite to say so. Richie never spoke of it, always turning the topic of parents into a joke about Eddie's mom. It was impossible not to notice, however, the way that he walked home through snow in the winter, the way his clothes were never mended and sometimes not even washed, the way he'd joke about every inappropriate subject except alcohol. They'd all caught on when his dad stopped showing up to parent teacher conferences, school plays, and birthdays that he wasn't around anymore.

As with many situations, it was all okay until it wasn't. Richie was in good spirits, cracking jokes and screwing around, and it seemed to Eddie that nothing was significantly worse than usual. That was until he showed up one day dressed up to the nines with a face like thunder. It felt like a scene from a movie, where he walked down the hall and every face turned to stare.

Richie Tozier, *the* Richie Tozier, nerd of the year, the boy who never shut up about the length of his dick, was wearing a dress. His longish black hair was tied back with a pastel pink ribbon, his face smeared with makeup (that he seemed to have struggled against), and his feet clad in pink sneakers.

In fact, if it weren't for the soda bottle glasses magnifying his tear-filled eyes, he would be totally unrecognisable.

Eddie knew about Richie's past. He, Stan, and Bill had been sworn to secrecy the summer after fourth grade, the first time they went swimming at the quarry.

Richie had told them how, aged 7, he'd stopped living as a girl and his parents had to move the family from Virginia to Maine to keep Richie safe, because people are evil, especially if you're anything outside their idea of normal. He arrived in Derry in the middle of the third grade with an awkward haircut and an even more awkward personality. He was introduced to the class as Richard, and nobody, not even the teachers, knew that he had ever been anything else. It had to be that way, but through a combination of trust and fear that the water would turn his white underwear see through and expose his big secret, Richie came clean. It hadn't really been mentioned after that, and the longer Richie lived as a boy, the more confident he became. It was the safety and security of being true to himself that turned him into the wise cracking asshole he is today.

Well, not today. On this day in particular, there wasn't a hint of the rude comedian. He was a shell, quiet and anxious and on the verge of a total breakdown.

Eddie didn't know what to do other than grab Richie's shaking hand and pull him into the boys' bathroom. Stanley and Bill followed nervously, shooing away all their giggling and jeering classmates. Once in the bathroom, he checked that all the stalls were empty and starting telling everyone what to do.

"Stan, watch the door from outside. Don't let anyone in until I've got Richie sorted. Bill, run to my locker. The combination is 5-12-32. There's a pair of red galoshes and some jeans. Bring them here, as quickly as you can."

At that moment, he turned to Richie and his tone changed. Instead of being in full on leader mode, his voice became softer and his movements more gentle.

"Rich? Richie, dude, I need you to listen to me. I have a spare shirt in my backpack, and Bill's bringing some pants and shoes. Okay?" Richie didn't nod, so Eddie continued. "I have baby wipes as well, I can get the makeup off you. But you gotta calm down first, okay? I can't help you until you're breathing normally."

"Sorry." Richie gulped, the tears he'd been blinking back beginning to spill. "I'm sorry."

Eddie looked to Stan in the doorway, making fearful eye contact. Richie Tozier didn't cry. Richie Tozier had three emotions: ridiculously positive, intensely angry, and terrified. This was none of those things- this was sadness, distress, pain. Richie Tozier didn't feel pain. Richie Tozier was unbreakable.

And yet here he was, broken.

Bill stumbled back into the room, passing the clothes to Eddie. Eddie smiled gratefully, and gestured for Bill to go stand outside with Stanley.

"Richie? It's just us in here. I've got clothes you can put on, and then we can sort out the makeup, okay? I need you to try and calm down first, though, I can't help you while you're crying."

"Sorry."

"You don't have to apologise, okay? But I have to help you and I can't do that quite yet."

Richie sniffled and threw his arms round Eddie, sobbing and sniffing into his shoulder. Eddie pulled the taller boy closer into him. He was trying to ignore the intrusive thoughts of how many germs were in the snot streaming from Richie's nose onto his shoulder. Things like this were the reason Eddie brought spare clothes, but obviously he didn't need them as much as his friend today.

After a few minutes, Richie's tears calmed down and he pulled away from the hug. Eddie found himself missing the contact.

After a deep breath to steady himself, Richie untied the laces of the pink sneakers and tossed them carelessly to the side. He smiled weakly as Eddie passed him the jeans and slid them on under the dress. He pulled the ribbons from his hair and slid his glasses off his face, and pulled the dress off over his head. Keeping his head bowed to avoid eye contact, he took the blue shirt from Eddie's grip and pulled it on with shaky hands.

Eddie glanced out of the window and acknowledged the rain, pulling off his canvas sneakers to replace with the galoshes. He got sick easily, and rain seeping through his shoes always ended up giving him a cold. He didn't mind giving away the sneakers until Richie had

his regular shoes back.

When Richie's outfit was all on, he spoke again, his voice still sounding a little cracked and broken. "You can look now."

"Thanks." Eddie shifted his gaze from the window back to his friend, and it was heartbreaking to look at. With his hair down and regular(ish) clothes back on, he looked more comfortable. But the smeared makeup had taken on a kind of grim comedy, and Eddie clocked for the first time that Richie's nails had been painted a pearly pink and were digging into his palms with force. Eddie's breath caught in his throat, but he knew realistically that it was the wrong time to panic or cry. Richie was his priority right now.

"Mind getting a little closer?" Eddie asked, rifling through his fanny pack. Richie silently moved forward so the knees of their crossed legs were touching. "Thanks. I'm gonna take off the makeup now, is that alright?"

He was careful to say the makeup, not your makeup. He didn't want to make it seem like the girly stuff was a part of Richie. The shaky boy nodded and Eddie carefully dabbed at his face with a baby wipe that he'd pulled from his fanny pack. The room was eerily quiet as he gently removed all the makeup, so Eddie started rambling.

"These wipes are hypoallergenic so you're not gonna break out or whatever. They smell pretty good too, I mean not that you smell bad or anything but, you know, it's nice."

"Cool."

"I used to have another brand that smelled great, but they weren't hypoallergenic and they made my face sting so my mom changed which ones she got. It's important to have wipes, y'know? Like, what if you spill something and you need to clean it up? They're overlooked."

"Eddie?"

"Yeah?"

"Shut up."

Eddie smiled a little, because this was the first time ever that Richie was telling somebody else to stop talking.

"Can I see your hands? I need to use some antiseptic where your nails

have dug in.”

“Is the makeup gone?”

“Totally. You wouldn't know it was there.”

Richie reluctantly placed his hands palm up on Eddie's knees. They were shaky, but no longer to the point where Eddie couldn't work on them. He dug into his fanny pack again, taking out two pre-packed antiseptic wipes, two cotton pads, and a small bottle of acetone. 1

Taking Richie's left hand gently into his own, Eddie tore open the first wipe packet with his teeth and started wiping away the grime and hints of blood from his palm. When he glanced up, he noticed that Richie was staring dead at his face. Eddie offered an encouraging smile, and the corners of Richie's mouth turned up in response. He pasted some small band aids over the crescent moon shaped gouges, and repeated the process on Richie's right hand. He then poured the acetone onto the cotton pad and started clearing off the nail polish. They both stayed silent while he did, listening to each other's breathing to keep calm. A few minutes later, Richie looked just like he always did.

“Thanks.” Richie murmured quietly.

“No problem man.”

It felt odd to not be flinging insults back and forth. That wasn't the only thing that felt strange. Seeing Richie like this was scary- he was quiet, he was emotional, he was afraid. It hurt seeing him that way.

There was an unspoken agreement among the Losers that Bill was their fearless leader. Beverly was the mother of the group, Stanley was the logic, Ben was the brains, Mike the emotional support, and Richie was the comic relief. When he wasn't cracking jokes, the world seemed to lose its balance.

This wasn't like the serious moments where he'd initiate a group hug, or speak quietly to Bill until the leader stopped tearing himself apart about Georgie. Eddie knew Richie was capable of turning it off when the situation called for it, but this didn't feel switched off; it felt like the light had been forcibly torn out of him. There were no words for

it, nothing he could think of to say. Eddie felt like he was forcing himself to hold back tears.

His voice cracked as he called “Stan? Bill? You can come back in.”

The other boys walked in- Bill looked as nervous as Eddie, but Stan was totally normal.

“Nice shirt, Trashmouth.” he said, smirking at the slightly-too-small bright yellow shirt that read ‘I WAS A PARTICIPANT IN THE 1988 DERRY SUMMER FAIR HALF MILE FUN RUN!’

Richie’s eyes lit up at the insult. “Thanks, I borrowed it from your mom last night.”

“Not likely, little boys full of shit aren’t her type.”

“Awwww, Stanley, no need to project your mommy issues onto me.”

“Fuck you, Tozier.”

“That’s Eddie’s job.” he winked, and Eddie spluttered, blushing for a few seconds before rolling his eyes and pulling Richie into the tightest hug of his life.

Bill, being Bill, dropped to his knees and joined the hug, holding the boys as close as he physically could. Stan also edged down to join them, gently draping his arms over the huddle of trembling preteen boys, because despite the image he tried to present, he cared deeply about Richie, as he did all his friends, and seeing Richie in that state had shaken him somewhat.

They stayed that way for almost thirty seconds, before Stan came up from his awkward squat and shook his hands off.

“I love you dearly, and I’m glad you’re alright, but that floor is fucking disgusting and I think I just knelt in piss.”

“What level disgusting? Eddie’s mom’s face, or Eddie’s mom’s underwear?”

Eddie gasped, swatting Richie on the arm. “Dude!”

Richie just responded with a shit eating grin, and jumped to his feet, signalling that it was time to leave the bathroom. Stan and Bill walked out side by side, and Richie hung back for a few seconds with Eddie. He turned to face him, and the cheeky smirk slipped from his face again.

“Thank you for this. I mean it, sincerely. I didn't want any of you seeing me like that.”

“I get it.”

“You don't. You can't, but thank you. Of all the loser hypochondriacs in the world, I'm glad I found you.”

Eddie looked almost ready to protest, but Richie quickly silenced him with a peck on the lips.

“I-I-I.” Eddie tried to form a coherent sentence, but was too busy acknowledging the fireworks in his stomach and the smirk on Richie's face.

Before he had a chance to respond, Richie bounded out of the room, hollering “Don't be late for geography, Eds!” as he went.

Eddie waited for the blush on his cheeks to die down before following.